

Light

12-96

MAY 13 REC'D

Property of
Graduate Theological Union

LEVEL
ONE



... on a
New World

Published for the Bexley Christadelphian Ecclesia by



Light Bible Publications,

Mr J. Cordial, 15 Wilton Drive, Ditton,

Kent ME20 6PL, England

EDITOR

*David Evans, 57 Longmead Drive,
Sidcup, Kent DA14 4NT, England.*

CORRESPONDENCE EDITOR

*Richard Griffiths, Fforest Fach,
Gorsewood Road, Hartley, Longfield,
Kent DA3 7DE, England*

VOLUME TWELVE

NUMBER 8

MARCH/APRIL 1992

CONTENTS

Editorial	page 1
The Need	page 3
The Means	page 9
The Perfect Sacrifice	page 15
The Witness of History	page 20

Editorial

JESUS THE CHRIST, the **anointed one**, the only begotten Son of God is undeniably central to the purpose of The Almighty. In the Word of God, the Bible, we have the only record of the plan and purpose that God has with mankind, a plan for **saving** man from the death he deserves because of **sin**. From beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation, the plan for saving is developed in a golden thread of **truth**. Jesus is revealed before his birth and declared to be the saviour of mankind through the words of the prophets, as Jesus later said:-

‘...These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.’¹

The New Testament record not only gives us the inspired account of the life, works and the death of the Son of God, but also clearly and beautifully sets out what he achieved by His sacrifice and leaves us in no doubt that in his resurrection, we too, can have a hope for the future.

This edition of **LIGHT on the Sacrifice of Christ**, is presented as a companion issue to the earlier publication in this special series, **LIGHT on the Lord Jesus Christ**. It is intended to summarise clearly what the **sacrifice** of Christ achieved and we believe it is necessary to reiterate Bible teaching on this subject, which though vital, - a matter of life or death - is so often misunderstood in the religious world today.

‘And this is **life eternal**, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.’²

This edition of **LIGHT on a New World**, is dedicated to promoting that knowledge.

The Editor

The Sacrifice of Christ

A Special Issue
of
LIGHT...on a New World

The Need

‘REVOLVING UPON ITS own axis and describing an ample circuit through the boundless fields of space, is a planet of the solar system bearing upon its surface a population of over a thousand millions, subject to sin, disease and death.’¹

Those words form the opening lines of a work written nearly 150 years ago and provide, we think, a fitting introduction to the following articles which are intended to bring before the readers the origin of this awful plight of the human race and the means which has been ordained by God for remedying this situation.

Humanly speaking, there is no remedy whatever, as nearly six thousand years of history amply testify. The approach to the problem in these articles will be exclusively Biblical — we are not concerned for one moment with the views of mere human theorists and speculators and will make no further reference to them.

THE FALL OF MAN

In the early chapters of the book of Genesis,² we have the record of the creation and fall of man — known perhaps more from ridicule than belief. There we are told quite clearly why it is that the race is subject to sin, disease and death. But not only so — we are told of the appointed remedy and for the purpose of this first article, attention will be concentrated upon the narrative found in chapters three and four. We shall see that the narrative combines literal and figurative meanings in a manner and to a degree which only inspiration could accomplish and embraces teaching and principles which permeate the rest of Scripture.

We see then Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden in idyllic surroundings,³ in harmony with their Creator, enjoying daily contact with the angels, and through them with God. We read that Adam was placed in the garden for the purpose, amongst other things, that he might dress it and keep it⁴ — the latter word conveying the idea of protecting and preserving it. He was free to enjoy all the produce of the garden with the exception of what is described as the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.⁵ He would partake of that only on pain of death.

¹*Elpis Israel* by John Thomas p. 1 ²Genesis 2.3 ³Genesis 2.8 ⁴Genesis 2.15 ⁵Genesis 2.16,17

An inhabitant of the gardens seems to have been the serpent, described as being more 'subtle' (cunning) than any best of the field.⁶ He was evidently a keen observer and listener to all that transpired. He was aware of the restriction which had been placed upon the man and woman⁷ and as the record indicates, interpreted it as a means of keeping them in ignorance and thereby in subjection to their Creator.

With his limited understanding, he devised a plan which would encourage the occupants of the garden to partake of the forbidden tree. By this means they would gain the knowledge they were lacking, putting them on an equal footing with their angelic companions.⁸ It only remained for them to eat of the fruit of the tree of life in the midst of the garden and so avoid the threatened punishment of death. To Eve, it all sounded so simple and so attractive that she partook of the forbidden tree and persuaded Adam to do likewise.⁹ Then everything went wrong for them.

Let us say at this point that we need take no heed of the carping criticism of those who ridicule the idea of a talking serpent, or of trees able to impart knowledge or life. Once admit the power of the Almighty, then nothing is impossible.

THE EFFECT OF SIN

To return to Adam and Eve. Truly they gained knowledge which they did not previously possess — 'the eyes of them both were opened'¹⁰ — but they also, for the first time, came face to face with unpleasant realities. They found a guilt complex — they realised they were naked and there proved to be a very close connection between these two conditions. They were now guilty of disobeying God and this guilt was transposed into a sense of nakedness.

It can be shown from Scripture that nakedness is a symbol of sinfulness¹¹ and when Adam and Eve made themselves 'aprons' to cover their nakedness,¹² what they were attempting to do, in a figure, was to cover up their sinful condition. Barely had they time to make these 'aprons' when they became aware of the presence of the LORD God in the garden.¹³ They took fright and immediately attempted to hide themselves — an effort equally as futile as the attempt to hide their guilt.¹³ It would seem that their fear and their confusion diverted their minds from the possibility of eating of the tree of life and so avoiding the threatened punishment of death.

Consider the paralysing effects of a guilty conscience! Look at the pathetic figure of Adam as God called him from his hiding place¹⁴ and by a simple question elicited his confession — yet a confession brazen enough to attempt to implicate God in his guilt:—

'The woman who thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat.'¹⁵

⁶Genesis 3.1 ⁷Genesis 3.1 ⁸Genesis 3.5 ⁹Genesis 3.6 ¹⁰Genesis 3.7 ¹¹Hebrews 4.13; Revelation 3.17; 16.15 ¹²Genesis 3.7 ¹³Genesis 3.8 ¹⁴Genesis 3.9 ¹⁵Genesis 3.12

Likewise, when the LORD confronted the woman, she diverted the blame onto the serpent.¹⁶ How true to the experience of life! We wrong a loved friend — we try to hide it — we fear to face him or her again and the relationship is no longer the same. It is exactly thus that this simple narrative expounds for us the origin and the effect of the first transgression of divine law.

GOD INTERVENES

Let us look now at the steps the LORD took to deal with the new situation — steps which the serpent could never have anticipated and which spelled failure to his plan from its inception. The serpent in fact becomes the federal head, the beginning of a class of men and women who are ignorant of and unresponsive to divine law. Without staying to consider all the aspects of the punishment pronounced upon Adam and Eve, suffice it to notice that the threat of death was confirmed upon them because of their sin.¹⁷

So the Apostle Paul, writing upon inspiration some four thousand years later, penned these words:—

‘Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men for that all have sinned.’¹⁸

Here we arrive at the only authentic explanation for mankind, being in the grip of sin, disease and death.

A COVERING FOR SIN

But we proceed to examine the narrative still further. After pronouncing judgment upon Adam and Eve, we next read of an almost incidental action by God, but one of tremendous import. We read that God made them coats of skin and clothed them.¹⁹ This incident must be read, bearing in mind what we have already learned, that nakedness is used in Scripture as a symbol of sin, and just as nakedness has to be covered, so too sin has to be covered from God’s eyes.

Almost every word here is important. The ‘aprons’ only partly covered Adam and Eve, whereas we are told that the skins ‘clothed’ them ie completely covered their nakedness. The first lesson this teaches us is that only God, not man, can provide the complete covering for sin.

The second important lesson derives from the fact that, in order to provide the coats of skins, the animals themselves (most likely lambs) had to be slain. This tells us how sin can be effectively covered (or atoned for, as the word means), namely by the shedding of the life blood of an innocent victim.

¹⁶Genesis 3.13 ¹⁷Genesis 3.19 ¹⁸Romans 5.12 ¹⁹Genesis 3.21

These figurative transactions in Eden point forward to the perfect provision, which God ordained right from the first transgression, of the sinless Lamb of God — the Lord Jesus Christ — who was to come at a later time and offer himself as a perfect covering for sin. The sacrifice of Jesus will be explained in detail in the two succeeding articles.

Meanwhile, we return to Genesis to notice some other details which claim our attention. After the provision of the coats of skin, we read of positive steps being taken to preclude any possibility of Adam and Eve, now in a condemned state, from partaking of the tree of life²⁰ and so live for ever as immortal sinners — a horrendous prospect and one which God would not possibly have allowed to happen. To prevent such a possibility, we read that the man was driven from the garden for the express purpose that he should not live for ever!²¹

This contrasts with the almost universal belief that man possesses an immortal soul which lives on for ever. It certainly is not found in the Bible! It is a pagan fiction — a perpetuation in fact of the serpent's lie in the beginning when it said to Eve — 'Ye shall not surely die'. In addition, we read that Cherubims and a flaming sword were placed at the entrance to the garden in order to 'keep' the way of the tree of life.²² Again, we must notice carefully the words used. We meet here again in the expression 'to KEEP the way of the tree of life', the same idea as when Adam was first put in the garden to dress and to KEEP it ie he was to protect it, to preserve it. So the Cherubim and the flaming sword were there, not to bar access to the way of the tree of life for ever, but simply to protect and preserve that access and, of course, the tree of life from any unlawful or improper approach.

What is being taught here in symbol is that the way to the tree of life — in other words, the subsequent attainment to eternal life by fallen man is on the basis of provisions which God has made — and those provisions are focused upon the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have a beautiful confirmation of this teaching in the words of Jesus in the last book of the Bible, where he speaks of those who at his second coming will be given the right to the tree of life.²³

THE USE OF ANIMAL SACRIFICE

It can be established from the early chapters of Genesis that a system of worship, involving the sacrifice of animal blood, was instituted right from the beginning. It is equally obvious from what we read in chapter 4 of Genesis of the formal worship by Cain and Abel that a set procedure had already been laid down.

Let us consider the words of Genesis 4.3,4:—

'And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he ALSO brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof . . .'²⁴

²⁰Genesis 3.22,23 ²¹Genesis 3.24 ²²Genesis 3.24 ²³Revelation 22.14 ²⁴Genesis 4.1,2

Clearly these words indicate a formal system of worship involving both the offering of the fruits of man's labours and also the offering of animal sacrifice and the shedding of blood. Now it is important to notice that, whilst Abel's offerings were accepted,²⁵ those of Cain were not²⁶ — and it is not difficult to see why. Cain simply brought the fruits of the ground — a required token of the dedication of his labours to God — whilst Abel brought the fruits of his labours, but ALSO the essential animal sacrifice which embraced the element of the shedding of blood for the covering or atonement for sin.

By omitting the animal sacrifice, Cain was effectively saying that he had no sins to be forgiven — or, at the least, supposed he could serve God as he thought best — thus making the same errors as did Adam and Eve when they sought to cover their sin with the aprons made of fig leaves. We read that Cain was angry at the rejection of his offering — but it was quickly pointed out to him by God that he comply with the divine requirements and bring his sin offering and offer that first, then he too would meet with approval.²⁷

This record of the worship by Cain and Abel serves to enforce the lesson that God having, in His graciousness, provided the means whereby He is willing to overlook human transgression, demands that those provisions be conscientiously and scrupulously observed — otherwise there can be no forgiveness of sin and no escape from its consequences.

F J Young
Redhill

²⁵Genesis 4.5 ²⁶Genesis 4.6 ²⁷Genesis 4.7

THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST

The Means

WE HAVE SEEN from the previous article that death was the punishment pronounced by God against Adam and Eve for their disobedience to His commandment. Since that time, men and women have been subject to death because of personal sin.¹ We are naturally estranged from God, being separated by our sin.

However, from the beginning, God indicated His purpose to achieve reconciliation with man. This was shown in the provision of skins which required the death of an animal. In this incident, there is an allusion to a fundamental principle taught in the Bible.

We read in the New Testament:—

‘ . . . Without shedding of blood is no remission (ie forgiveness).’²

Forgiveness of sin is the *only* way in which we can be reconciled to God. The way in which this forgiveness was to be made available is the subject of this article.

The covering of sin by the shedding of blood was provided for in the law given by God to his people Israel. Within that law it is written, ‘ . . . *it is the blood that maketh an atonement (ie reconciliation) for the soul.*’³

For this reason God’s people were required to offer a number of different animal sacrifices. This was the way appointed by God for the Israelites to obtain forgiveness for their sins and so be reconciled to God.

We will refer to three specific examples within God’s law to illustrate this principle.

THE SIN OFFERING

Firstly, the details relating to the sin offering. This involved the sacrifice of an animal by the offender. In certain cases, the sacrifice was to be brought to the door of the Tabernacle (the tent set up for the worship of God) and killed by the offerer.⁴

¹Romans 5.12 ²Hebrews 9.22 ³Leviticus 17.11 ⁴Leviticus 4.4,15,24,29

These facts are very significant and help to explain the purpose of sacrifice. The shedding of the animal's blood represents the pouring out of the life, for it is also stated in the law that '*the life of the flesh is in the blood.*'³ Life cannot be sustained without blood. The continual loss of blood will inevitably result in death.

By the shedding of blood in sacrifice, the offerer was bringing about the death of the animal. At the same time, in the case of the sin offering, the person making the sacrifice was associated with death by placing his hand on the head of the animal. In this action, the offerer was acknowledging that *he* was worthy of death because of sin.

The offering of a sacrifice also acknowledged the righteousness of God. It was a confession by the person making the offering that God was just in condemning man to death.

THE FEAST OF PASSOVER

For our second example, we will consider the Feast of Passover which was intended to remind Israel of their miraculous deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

The central feature of this feast was the sacrifice of the Passover lamb which had to be free from defect.⁵ At the first Passover Feast, the blood of the lamb protected the people from death. The blood had to be painted onto the doorposts of the Israelite houses to save them from the angel sent to destroy all the Egyptian firstborn.⁶

Again we see that animal sacrifice was the way appointed by God to save his people from the effects of sin.

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

Our last example is concerned with a specific day every year chosen by God to reconcile his people to him. This was known as the '*Day of Atonement*'. Full details of the instructions which had to be followed in order for atonement to be made are found in Leviticus 16. In summary, it is clear that the High Priest could only make reconciliation for himself and his people through the shedding of blood — in this instance, the sacrifice of a bullock and a goat.

The blood of these animals was to be sprinkled on various objects associated with worship in the Tabernacle.

'In this way (ie by sprinkling the blood) he will make atonement . . .'⁷

³Leviticus 17.11 ⁵Exodus 12.5 ⁶Exodus 12.7-13 ⁷Leviticus 16.5,16 (NIV)

THE TYPICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LAW OF MOSES

All of these examples confirm the basic truth mentioned earlier that 'without shedding of blood is no remission'.²

But the sacrifices made under the law could not provide a permanent covering for sin.

'It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins'.⁸

They could not achieve a lasting reconciliation between God and man. The animals offered in sacrifice had no knowledge of sin. The shedding of their blood could not therefore be fully effective in the removal of sin.

These offerings were only a *token* of the means by which God would bring about reconciliation. They pointed forward to the superior sacrifice which was to be made by Jesus. He was the lamb provided by God to take away the sin of the world.⁹

PERFECT OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST

Jesus possessed the same nature as each one of us and was therefore prone to temptation.¹⁰ But despite this fact, we are told concerning him that '*[he] did no sin neither was guile found in his mouth*'.¹¹ Like the Passover lamb, his character was without fault.

In this sense, he was the living embodiment of the character of his Father (ie God) — a perfect reflection of the glory of God.¹² By way of contrast, we think of Adam who was originally made in the '*image of God*'¹³ but lost his privileged position through sin.

It was the perfect obedience of Christ to his Father's commandments which formed the basis of his supreme sacrifice. We are told in the Old Testament:—

'. . . to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams'.¹⁴

Jesus is the only person to have human nature, but keep the law of God without fault. We have an insight into his mind in the following words:—

'. . . Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God'.¹⁵

Throughout his life, he conformed to his Father's commandments and ultimately sacrificed himself in loving obedience to his Father's will. By this means, he has made possible the reconciliation of man to God.

²Hebrews 5.12 ⁸Hebrews 10.4 ⁹John 1.29 ¹⁰Hebrews 2.14 ¹¹1 Peter 2.22 ¹²John 1.14

¹³Genesis 1.27 ¹⁴1 Samuel 15.22 ¹⁵Hebrews 10.5-7

THE WEAKNESS OF MAN

The law which God gave to Israel could not achieve reconciliation. It demanded a standard of perfection to which the people could not attain because of their sinful nature. Inevitably they would disobey God's commandments and, as a result, would be condemned to death. The animal sacrifices available to them under the law could not fully cover their sin and were therefore unable to save them.

This was not the fault of God's law which was '*holy, and just and good*,'¹⁶ but testified to the weakness of man. We read this comment in the New Testament:—

'... what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh (ie mans' weakness through sinful nature), God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh ...'¹⁷

Mans' deficiency has been covered by the sacrifice of Christ who shared our nature but overcame sin through perfect obedience.

He is described as 'the way, the truth and the life'.¹⁸ In him we see God's way of reconciliation. 'He [has] put away sin by the sacrifice of himself'.¹⁹

The sacrifices of the law have their fulfilment in Christ. There is no need for them to be continued. They have been superseded by his superior sacrifice which *alone* can take away sin. The perfect standard of the law which previously condemned man to death has been removed by Christ.²⁰

ALIENATED FROM GOD

By nature, we are alienated from God. Sin forms a barrier described in the Bible as '*the dividing wall of hostility*'.²¹ Our natural mind is enmity against God — for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.²² We are all the servants of sin and sooner or later will receive the reward for our service in the form of death.²³

But God has provided a way of escape — the hope of salvation — through the sacrifice of Christ subject to our compliance with the conditions set out in his Word. Remember that, in the past, Israel had to follow the precise instructions contained in the law if their sacrifice was to be accepted. It is exactly the same for people who want to please God today. We must worship God on His terms — not in our own way.

It is possible for us to switch our allegiance from the service of sin to the service of Christ. Such a course of action is imperative if we are to avoid our natural destiny — if we are to escape eternal death in the grave. We must forsake the natural mind which tends only to sin and in its place seek to develop a spiritual mind.

¹⁶Romans 7.12 ¹⁷Romans 8.3 ¹⁸John 14.6 ¹⁹Hebrews 9.26 ²⁰Colossians 2.14

²¹Ephesians 2.14 (NIV) ²²Romans 8.7 ²³Romans 6.23

The only way in which we can do this is to obey the commandments of Christ to present '... [our] bodies a **living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable unto God' . . .²⁴ after his example.

We can be 'redeemed' from sin and death through the sacrifice of Christ. Literally, he has paid the ransom for our deliverance. This could not have been achieved by the sacrifice of animals. Neither is it in our own power to save ourselves. We cannot be 'redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold' but only with 'the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot'²⁵ who has offered himself as a perfect sacrifice for sin.

FORGIVENESS IN CHRIST

Faith and obedience are the credentials of a true Christian. But we will still be subject to temptation as long as we possess sinful nature. Like the Israelites under God's law, there will be occasions when we disobey the commandments. But, unlike the animal sacrifices offered under the law of blood, Christ can *fully* cover our sins. Through his perfect sacrifice, we can obtain forgiveness. He has broken down '... the dividing wall of hostility'²⁶ — the barrier of sin — so that we can 'come nigh'²⁷ (ie be reconciled) to God 'through his blood'.²⁷

This principle is in harmony with the justice of God. Sin brings death, but obedience gives life. Forgiveness is available through Christ — he can reconcile us to God. By becoming related to the perfect life of Christ, we can have the hope of eternal life.

So we read in the Bible:—

'... the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'²⁸

Our weakness can be covered in Christ, but we must recognise that presumptuous sins will not go unpunished.

'He [Jesus] is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.'²⁹

This is necessary to make atonement on their behalf through his perfect sacrifice.

In this sense, Jesus can carry our sins.

'... he was wounded by our transgressions, ... bruised for our iniquities: ... with his stripes we are healed'³⁰

D Fletcher
West Wickham

²⁴Romans 12.1 ²⁵1 Peter 1.18,19 ²⁶Ephesians 2.14 (NIV) ²⁷Ephesians 2.13 ²⁸1 John 1.7,9 ²⁹Hebrews 7.25 ³⁰Isaiah 53.5

THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST

The Perfect Sacrifice

HOW COULD A man, stripped naked and writhing in agony as he hung crucified with huge nails driven through his hands and feet, be the perfect answer to anything, much less to the greatest of all problems facing the human race? Death for Jesus would be certain, and before long the land in which he laboured so faithfully would seek him in vain. Such inflicted torture was not uncommon where the Roman Legions were in control. It might well be looked upon as just another demonstration of human barbarity — a vicious outburst of vengeance against a chief offender. There had been a trial, if it could be called that. The charges brought against him were not worthy of death in the opinion of those who had the duty to judge the matter. Yet the implacable determination to have him destroyed was so urgent that a sentence of death was wrung from a reluctant ruler.¹

Why did their anger burn so hot against him? Why did he not escape arrest when he had the chance? Why did he not resist? He could have, with a word, rallied to his side, 'more than twelve legions of angels.' Where was God in all this? Was Jesus His only begotten Son? Was he dearly beloved? What was this 'will of the Father' he was so intent in keeping?²

A NATION IN TURMOIL

At the time the Jewish nation had been in considerable turmoil. A very powerful organisation of 'religious leaders' had developed around the 'Law of Moses'. This Law had regulated nearly every facet of domestic life for nearly 1500 years and had strictly formulated the worship of their God, whom they believed had brought them up out of the land of Egyptian bondage. These 'leaders' alone felt competent to deal with all religious questions, and reserved to themselves the right to interpret the Scriptures kept in their custody. But certain of the Jewish Prophets had predicted the coming of a Messiah and had spoken of times and places which would be involved in this long anticipated event.³ It was into this rigid and dogmatic atmosphere, charged with an air of expectancy, that Jesus stepped forward with his claim of Messiahship. Was he the one which was to come, or was he not? Some said he was, others said he was an imposter.⁴ This was the question which would fill the land with violent debate for three and a half years, and few would escape the bitterness of division which would cleave asunder even the closest of family relationships.⁵

¹Matthew Chapter 27 ²Matthew 26.53 ³Matthew 26.42 ⁴Daniel 9.26, Micah 5.2

⁵John 7.40-46 ⁶Matthew 10.34-36

Jesus soon became widely known throughout Judea. Huge crowds from all walks of life began to follow him, seeking relief from the illnesses which caused so much suffering, and to hear him speak of a coming Kingdom. They wanted to know how *they* could be a part of that future age when he would be a great King, sitting on the throne of David, his ancestral father.⁷

But the concentration of power in these 'leaders' was not a happy picture. Their traditions had all but obscured the spiritual intent of the Law,⁸ and human greed had found a fertile field in which it could thrive. They were not only jealous of their status, but highly protective of the ease and luxury with which they were surrounded. Jesus was a growing threat to this system of human hierarchy. The conflict raged. Bitter hatreds seethed under the public humiliations they suffered. Time after time they were put to silence at the hands of a poor carpenter whose mighty deeds of miraculous benefit⁹ could not be denied, and whose words they could challenge only at the peril of their reputation before the people.¹⁰

DESPISED AND REJECTED

Wounded pride seeks vengeance. In envy there was refuge and a plot to kill. They despised him more each day, as they saw their lofty positions undermined. They could not, they dare not rest until they saw him lifted up on a cross as the worthy victim of Roman justice. 'It is finished', cried Jesus, and his head fell forward in the welcome release of death.¹¹ He would not feel the Roman spear which pierced his side.¹²

In all this, who was victorious? The lifeless body of Jesus was taken down and placed in a nearby tomb. The rock which covered the entrance was tightly sealed. It is not recorded, but one might suppose that those who mocked this dying man would meet in joyous celebration.

Fortunately, the account does not end there. After three days Jesus was restored to life, and he appeared frequently to many of his followers. No longer would their fears and shattered dreams fill them with disappointment. The scars on his hands, his feet and on his side could not be denied.¹³ After forty days, Jesus ascended into the heavens. A cloud enveloped him and he disappeared from human sight.¹⁴ Time passed quickly and in a few years it was a different story in the city of Jerusalem. In a comparatively short time it lay in ruins. Many thousands of its inhabitants were slain by the Romans, and those who survived were dispersed throughout the then known world to suffer the consequences of their own request — His blood be on us, and on our children.¹⁵ For Jesus, the keeping of his Father's will had been the 'perfect answer'.

⁷Luke 1.32 ⁸Matthew 15.6 ⁹John 11.47,48 ¹⁰Mark 11.18 ¹¹John 19.30 ¹²John 19.34
¹³John 20.24-28 ¹⁴Acts 1.9 ¹⁵Matthew 27.25

THE WILL OF THE FATHER

Close association with their risen Lord would give his disciples a much needed opportunity to see and understand many things which had before seemed so difficult and perplexing. They could now begin to make sense out of what had taken place. They could begin to appreciate what was accomplished, and see the reason for the precise way in which it needed to be done. Jesus was alive, but much more than this. He was now immortal and demonstrated the characteristics of Spirit nature.¹⁶ He was exalted to his Father's 'right hand',¹⁷ there to act as a High Priest¹⁸ and mediator for those who came to God through him. As in Adam, all the human race had been under the 'law of sin and death',¹⁹ so now in Christ, all who believed and obeyed the Truth, were under the 'law of the Spirit of Life'.²⁰ All power and authority has been given to Jesus²¹ while he awaits the time when he shall return to this earth and set up his Kingdom here.²²

Jesus *alone* was then capable of assessing the situation. His opinion of *what* happened and *why* it had to happen, is the only correct explanation of those events of which he was the central part. He saw the reason why his Father had to intervene in the way so tenderly described by Luke's record,²³ and beget him of our *exact* nature²⁴ and then required him to live a life of perfect obedience — a perfection of character forged under the extreme pressures of temptation and even a death by crucifixion. It was the only way the '*power of sin*' could be broken²⁵ in our nature which was condemned to death because of sin.²⁶ Jesus saw the reason why the Father required his blood to be shed.²⁷ It was the *only* way sin could be covered and a righteousness²⁸ imputed to mankind on the basis of faith, separate entirely from a 'Law' which the flesh, because of its weakness, could not keep.²⁹

Jesus understood the problem which had to be solved, and this was the reason he was successful in solving it. The 'power of death'³⁰ could not be destroyed until 'sin', its cause, was removed. He knew that he himself depended upon the blood of the covenant.³¹ He knew his Father loved him, and *that what would be accomplished in his death was the greatest act of mercy and love his Father could show toward mankind*.³² Jesus declared the righteousness of God.³³ He believed in the end result of his suffering. '... who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God'.³⁴

Like those who crowded around Jesus when he went about preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, we too want to have a part with him when he comes again. This time he will come as a great King.³⁵ All the world will be under his

¹⁶John 20.19 ¹⁷Hebrews 1.3; 12.2 ¹⁸Hebrews 9.11,12; 8.1,6 ¹⁹Romans 8.2 ²⁰Romans 8.2

²¹Matthew 28.18 ²²Acts 3.20,21 ²³Luke Chapter 1 ²⁴Romans 8.3; Hebrews 2.14

²⁵Romans 8.3 ²⁶Genesis 3.19 ²⁷Hebrews 9.22-28 ²⁸Romans 3.19-26 ²⁹Romans 4.13-25

³⁰Hebrews 2.14 ³¹Hebrews 7.21-28 ³²John 3.16 ³³Romans 3.25 ³⁴Hebrews 12.2

³⁵Luke 1.32,33 ³⁶Daniel 12.2; John 5.28,29

control and supervision, and his servants who have been faithful to him down through the ages will be restored to life³⁶ and will be given the gift of God which is eternal life.³⁷ They will rule and reign with him upon this earth. Death will have no more dominion over them.³⁸

THE PERFECT ANSWER FOR US

This is how the 'perfect answer' for Jesus can become the 'perfect answer' for us. God's love could not, and would not, flow toward those whose lives were orientated in sin;³⁹ but it could and would, flow toward those who could see the love of the Father in providing a 'sinless lamb' who would take away the sin of the world.⁴⁰ One would could *represent* us in a process which would restore us to the loving relationship which the Father desired.⁴¹ This process is called redemption,⁴² and it operates on the principles of faith⁴³ and obedience.⁴⁴

It is written that '*without faith it is impossible to please him*' (God), and faith is described by Paul as a full persuasion of the things God has promised.⁴⁵ If we know and believe these things, then we can have a righteousness imputed to us just like it was to Abraham. Then we can follow Jesus through the same process which won for him the great victory over sin. We can 'die' to sin in principle, and be buried just like he was. This is done in water and is called baptism.⁴⁶ When we arise out of this 'symbolic grave' we are styled 'new creatures'⁴⁷ and are said to be '*in Christ*'. If we are *in Christ* then we become heirs to the promises just like Abraham.⁴⁸ The 'perfect answer' for Christ becomes the 'perfect answer' for us. If death should overtake us before our Lord returns, it holds no fear, for he had demonstrated his power over the grave many times.⁴⁹ We shall but sleep,⁵⁰ unaware of passing time, until we 'hear his voice'.⁵¹ If we have 'done good' then we shall come forth to a resurrection of life and be made equal to the angels to die no more.⁵²

For Jesus, the shame, the indescribable agony, and his death, were all deliberate choices he made.⁵³ He chose not to escape arrest. He chose not to resist or ask for the 12 legions of angels to deliver him. He chose not to raise his voice in self defence, nor did he plead with Pilate or Herod to release him. His love for his Father and for those whom he would redeem with his willing sacrifice was the driving force that led him to do what he did. Nothing was a matter of chance. Nothing was the result of man's will, prevailing over his. There was no tragedy or humiliating defeat. Instead, a mighty, splendid, and glorious victory.⁵⁴ Who can measure the praise, and the thanksgiving of those who through the trial of their faith 'endured unto the end'⁵⁵ and who at last are with Jesus in his Kingdom? He will look upon the travail of his soul and be satisfied.⁵⁶

³⁷Romans 6.23 ³⁸Luke 20, 35,36 ³⁹Romans 8.7,8 ⁴⁰John 1.29,36 ⁴¹I Timothy 2.4

⁴²Romans 8.23; Hebrews 9.12 ⁴³Hebrews 11.6 ⁴⁴John 15.14 ⁴⁵Hebrews 11.1

⁴⁶Romans 6.3-12 ⁴⁷II Corinthians 5.17 ⁴⁸Galatians 3.26-29 ⁴⁹John 11.1-44

⁵⁰I Thessalonians 4.13-16 ⁵¹John 5.28,29 ⁵²Luke 20.36 ⁵³John 10.11-18

⁵⁴Acts 2.22-24; 4.9-12 ⁵⁵Matthew 24.13 ⁵⁶Isaiah 53.11

THE PERFECT SACRIFICE

The redeemed will sing in glad acclamation:—

‘ . . . Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth’.⁵⁷

T Mitchell
Ontario, Canada

⁵⁷*Revelation 5.9,10*

The witness of history

3. Now, there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, -a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principle men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.

Written by Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian, who was born shortly after the ascension of Christ and who recorded a history of the Jews.

Jewish Antiquities: xviii 3.3